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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BRUSSELS 000895

SIPDIS

STATE PASS S/CT FOR AMBASSADOR RON SCHLICHER AND KEREM  
BILGE, ANKARA FOR CAROLYN DELANEY, EUR/WE, EUR/PGI, EUR/SE,  
AND EUR/ERA

E.O. 12958: DNG: CO 06/20/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [PINR](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#) [BE](#)  
SUBJECT: BELGIUM ON PKK AND CT COOPERATION

REF: BRUSSELS 779

Classified By: Charge Wayne Bush for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (S) Summary: Principal Deputy Counterterrorism Coordinator Ambassador Ronald Schlicher met June 9 with Belgian CT officials to discuss PKK, Roj-TV, and wider CT cooperation; a luncheon hosted by the Charge covered additional CT themes. Ambassador Schlicher conveyed a message from Danish CT officials he met the day before in Copenhagen, that the Danes wished to increase information exchange and cooperation with the GOB on Roj-TV. Belgian CT experts told Ambassador Schlicher the fine levied on the Roj-TV production facility in Denderleeuw did not end its operations. The PKK is skilled at raising and extorting money and maintaining cash flow, they said, and hires the best lawyers to handle cases. The GOB has worked to improve coordination and cooperation with the Turkish government on the PKK and Roj-TV, but is more concerned with wider CT problems primarily in the Sahel, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Ambassador Schlicher said the U.S. was watching Al-Qaeda franchising closely, particularly Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. At a follow-on meeting at the Turkish Embassy, the Turkish DCM said he believed the Belgians were trying to improve their cooperation on PKK, but added that Ankara was not satisfied with what it perceived as little success in ending PKK activities in Belgium. End Summary.

Introduction

¶2. (U) Principal Deputy CT Coordinator Schlicher met with Belgian CT officials June 9 to discuss Roj-TV, the PKK, and wider CT cooperation between Belgium and the U.S. He then attended a luncheon hosted by the Charge that included a wider range of diplomatic, police, and judicial officials. The first meeting was attended by the PM's Security Advisor Francisca Bostyn, MFA CT Coordinator Thomas Baekelandt, Ministry of Interior (MinInt) Security Advisor Marc Van Laere, Francois Schell of the Ministry of Justice, Belgian Federal Police (BFP) Anti-Terrorism Coordinator Eddy Greif, State Security Service officers Peter Van De Parre and Rob Geukens, General Information and Security Service analyst Stephane Vandamme, Threat Center (OCAM/OCAD) Director Andre Vandoren, OCAM/OCAD Deputy Director Luc Verheyden, and Crisis Centre Director Alain Lefevre. The Luncheon guests were: Bostyn, Verheyden, Greif, and Baekelandt, plus additional guests Financial Intelligence Unit (CTIF) Director Jean-Claude Delapierre, BFP Brussels Chief Glen Audenaert,

JustMin Diplomatic Advisor Marc Van den Reeck, IntMin Diplomatic Advisor Karl Van den Bossche, and Federal Prosecutor Johan Delmulle. After the two Belgium-focused meetings, the Ambassador's party, which also included Ankara Regional Legal Advisor Carolyn Delaney and S/CT Officer Kerem Bilge, met with the Turkish DCM Can Incesu and Second Secretary from the Delegation to the EU Aytac Yilmaz.

PKK - Roj-TV  
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13. (S) Ambassador Schlicher explained to the GOB officials that he came to Europe to speak with the GOB and the Danes about the PKK and to promote cooperation on shutting down Roj-TV, the PKK's most important and costly propaganda program. He conveyed a message from Danish authorities that they sought closer information exchange with Belgium on its efforts against the PKK and Roj-TV; he suggested the June 15 Eurojust meeting as a good opportunity for the two countries to meet. The Danes had as yet not been able to build a strong case linking the broadcasts to terrorist incidents despite Turkish government cooperation. State Security said the EUR 6 million tax fine levied by Belgian tax authorities last year (see reftel) did not effect Roj-TV as had been hoped. The PKK had access to large sums of money, though the organization was having difficulty paying the fine with "clean" money. The PKK has hired a sophisticated expert in Belgian fiscal law to argue the case in court. They also predicted a new station would arise somewhere else in Europe were Belgium successful in closing the facility in Denderleeuw. Ambassador Schlicher shared that the Turks

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believed Norway, Sweden, or the Netherlands were likely follow-on destinations; he suggested more effort to understand the extortion and money-raising ability of the PKK. Greif said the BFP had conducted investigations for the Danes, and that there had been a few prosecutions in Belgium in recent months. He added that the rare extortion complaints were usually withdrawn out of fear within days when made.

14. (S) GOB contacts confirmed Belgian concerns about security threats in Belgium related to PKK activities, and also cited Turkish efforts to push Belgium to do more to pressure PKK linked residents. Verheyden said OCAM/OCAD maintained a general threat level for Kurdish - Turkish ethnic violence in Brussels neighborhoods at two out of five (low risk), but had raised the level to three out of five after PKK - Turkish military confrontations in Turkey led to violence between the two ethnic communities. Although the Belgians said that it was media coverage, including on Roj-TV, of those confrontations that tended to spark the violence, they did not seem willing to say that Roj-TV was inciting violence and then use this as an argument to close the station down. Baekelandt described the information regularly supplied by the Turkish embassy as useless for the purposes of constructing a strong legal case. Both Greif and Vandamme commented that Turkish and Belgian law were quite different. Baekelandt said both sides have made efforts to improve cooperation and communication to pursue cases effectively. He said the Turks occasionally ask Belgium to "administratively harass" suspected PKK operatives and supporters; he believes the GOB's expulsion of Moroccan intelligence operatives from Belgium last year has dissuaded the Turks from conducting any anti-PKK programs in Belgium.

15. (S) At the luncheon, Baekelandt said FM De Gucht visited Mosul on his last visit to Iraq, and learned first-hand that the GOT had recognized the regional Kurdish government in northern Iraq. Schlicher said recognition was a watershed change for Turkey. Bilge linked the GOT's recent defense of the autonomy of the Kurdish region against encroachments by Baghdad to an evolution in Turkish thinking. Delmulle said he had witnessed some improvement in Belgian - Turkish cooperation and mutual understanding on the legal issues

relating to the PKK. He himself had recently traveled to Turkey and met with prosecutors in Ankara and Istanbul. He said the GOB has tried to show the Turks that the PKK and DHKP/C are problems for Belgium as well; he was hopeful Belgian prosecutors would be able to achieve some convictions in the long-running Erdahl case this fall (see reftel). Verheyden thinks the Turks are starting to recognize that not all Kurds are PKK.

#### General CT Concerns and Cooperation

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¶16. (S) During the morning meeting, Baekelandt said France, Spain, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands were particularly concerned with Sahel nations from Algeria down through Mauritania. Ambassador Schlicher said the U.S. was closely watching Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, as well as events in Yemen. Afghanistan and Pakistan were priorities for both countries.

¶17. (S) At the luncheon, Ambassador Schlicher's explanation that the new Administration would be taking a holistic approach to CT cooperation received wide approval from the guests. The Charge asked if the GOB addressed the public on the importance of Belgium's operation in Afghanistan. Audenaert replied that the fragmented political landscape and differing opinions within Belgium's carefully constructed coalition governments often mitigate against obvious statements; the political class is aware that Brussels will be a Muslim majority city within five years and does not want to antagonize its population. Baekelandt added that grand designs and major addresses are not well received by the public and are rarely made. Van den Reeck said the government was thinking regularly about CT issues, which were larger than Afghanistan, even if the GOB does not regularly address its public on the subject. Bostyn mentioned PM Van Rompuy's trip to Afghanistan June 3, and his subsequent

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meeting with EU representatives, as a Belgian effort to defend Belgium's engagement in Afghanistan.

¶18. (S) The luncheon ended with a discussion of Al-Qaeda and radicalization. Ambassador Schlicher commented that the U.S. is closely watching Yemen and Somalia, two weakly-governed nations. Al-Qaeda seems to be focusing on survival, maintaining safe havens, and looking for cash donations for the first time. The U.S. is also trying to determine what the organization is thinking and would like to know its priorities for further jihad and struggle; Afghanistan, Egypt, and South Asia are likely areas of geographic focus. Baekelandt offered that radical jihadists were a problem the West would continue to confront. Van den Reeck said most believe these hard-core cases cannot be de-radicalized and must be dealt with. Audenaert said Belgium's anti-radicalization policy had merit and is designed to reduce domestic threats. The GOB policy tries to appeal to mothers who do not want to see their children involved in violent struggles. Verheyden said Belgium's OCAM/OCAD uses local and community police to relay potential radicalization threats in Muslim immigrant communities to the GOB.

#### Turkish Embassy

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¶19. (S) During a discussion at the Turkish Embassy First Counselor Can Incesu and Second Secretary from the Turkish Delegation to the EU Aytac Yilmaz exchanged views with Ambassador Schlicher's party. Incesu said in past years, he had the impression that Belgium placed little importance on the PKK, and past failed attempts to prosecute the PKK were difficult for Turkey to understand. He believed cooperation had improved, especially after several Belgian ministers visited Ankara in October 2008, and Chief Prosecutor Delmulle's trip in January 2009. Yilmaz said the GOT was not completely satisfied with EU cooperation, but considering the

continent-wide reach of the PKK, European cooperation against the PKK remains a Turkish priority. The GOT's main concerns Europe-wide are: extradition requests; refugee status granted to Kurds that Turkey has asked to be extradited; propaganda activities of the PKK in Europe, and keeping the PKK and its affiliates on the common position list. Ambassador Schlicher remarked that the listing would remain. Incesu agreed, but said a listing did not have a wide-enough reach. He said that in Belgium a listing affected finances only, and that a prosecutor has to tie an individual to terrorist actions to make a case, a higher standard than required in Turkey. Incesu also claimed the PKK had too many sympathizers in Belgium, who were able to neutralize the GOB's response; the Turkish Embassy has noted the GOB does not make strong statements condemning attacks in Turkey similar to those made by the governments of Germany or France.

Comment

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¶10. (S) Ambassador Schlicher's visit successfully raised our Belgian interlocutors' consciousness on PKK and Roj-TV issues in Belgium, and provided an opportunity to review with senior Belgian officials the new administration's developing approach to counterterrorism issues generally. There is currently excellent cooperation with the Belgians on counterterrorism. This visit helped to reinforce our counterparts' engagement with the U.S. and openness to U.S. views.

BUSH

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